DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 234 503 EA 016 090

AUTHOR Palaich, Robert; And Others
TITLE Setting up Blue Ribbon Commissions. Issuegram 15.
INSTITUTION Education Commission of the States, Denver, Colo.
PUB DATE 3 Jan 83
NOTE 10p.
AVAILABLE FROM Distribution Center, Education Commission of the States, 1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300, Denver, CO 80295 ($2.00 prepaid; quantity discounts; add $1.00 on non-prepaid orders to cover invoicing).
PUB TYPE Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Advisory Committees; Bulletins; *Educational Planning; Educational Policy; Elementary Secondary Education; Participative Decision Making; *Planning Commissions; *Policy Formation; Postsecondary Education; State Government; State Legislation; *Statewide Planning

ABSTRACT

Options and suggestions for setting up successful study commissions were gathered from 10 commissions that had recommended revisions of state educational policy on a variety of issues. Composed of respected citizens from across the state, each task force was created by the governor or legislature for a fixed duration. Some recommendations for setting up a commission include: having a thorough knowledge of the state, prospective commissioners, the policy area addressed, and other states' response to that issue; setting a desired goal and focusing on manageable issues; appointing commissioners willing to commit adequate time, including some legislators if the goal is new legislation. Suggestions for commission operation and activities include selecting knowledgeable staff, the use of consultants, incorporation of the commission as a nonprofit organization, realistically relating the duration of the commission to issue complexity, setting the agenda and scheduling meetings early, establishing channels for input by interest groups, and anticipating the effects of media coverage. (MJL)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED234503

.ecs issuegram

A service of the Education Commission of the States

15. Setting Up Blue Ribbon Commissions

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

S. V. Allen

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ISSUEGRAMS
are summary reports on major education issues written for state leaders. They include background information, analysis of differing views, lists of sources and references — all written for busy readers. Each is updated periodically. For more information, see inside back cover or call ECS Distribution Center at (303) 830-3820.

.ecs issuegram
Education Commission of the States
Distribution Center
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, Colorado 80295

First Class
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Denver, Colorado
Permit No. 153

EA 016 090

This Issuegram was prepared on January 3, 1983, by Robert Palaich, Janet Rogers-Clarke Johnson, Donald Burnes and Patricia Flakus-Mosqueda, Education Governance Center. For consultation or more detail, call 303-830-3642 or 303-830-3830.

15. Setting Up Blue Ribbon Commissions

The Issue

When governors or state legislators set up task forces or study commissions to generate options for education policy, they face a series of choices. Although most commissions serve the same basic function -- allowing political leaders and citizens to participate jointly in the development of policy -- state leaders must choose among a variety of options for creating commissions and planning commission operations and activities. Some of these options are presented below, to help policy makers plan strategies for setting up successful commissions.

Past Practice

The use of blue ribbon commissions is neither an isolated nor a recent phenomenon. Such commissions were established as early as the 1920s to investigate, plan and assess public policy in education. Commissions at that time tended to address broad education issues, an approach that changed during the 1940s and 1950s when special commissions were set up to help states develop policies on specific issues. During the 1960s, blue ribbon commissions were still used to

generate policy alternatives, but their effectiveness was challenged by critics who pointed out the limitations of creating short-lived organizations to address long-term problems. This led to revised expectations about what study commissions can accomplish. But commissions continue to be used, and used effectively, to examine a wide range of state education policy questions. Topics addressed in recent years have included accountability in the schools, vocational education, school finance formulas, the implementation of desegregation regulations and general planning for the future. Results have ranged from formal implementation of commission recommendations in new legislation to informal placing of a topic on a state's policy agenda.

Recent Findings

To gather the information and suggestions presented here, staff in the ECS Education Governance Center and a consultant contacted commissioners and staff of ten commissions in eight states. The states chosen are geographically diverse and the commissions selected had considered a variety of issues, some related to elementary/secondary education, some to postsecondary education. Commissioners and commission staff were promised that their responses would not be identified so that their comments could be candid.

All the commissions studied shared four characteristics: (1) they were created by the governor or the legislature; (2) they had predetermined starting dates and ending dates; (3) they were all "blue ribbon" commissions, in the sense that commissioners were respected citizens from across the state; and (4) they all recommended revisions in state education policy.

Creating the commission. ECS found that the people or institutions that set up study commissions generally addressed the concerns identified below.

- Objectives. The objectives established for the study commissions were of three basic types. One type was problem-solving in the policy development area, which generally led to the passage of new legislation to modify state policy. Sometimes, the problems to be solved were broad. One commission developed a new school finance formula, for example, and others changed the governance structure of higher education or elementary/secondary education. At other times, the problem was quite narrow, as it was for the commission that developed a desegregation plan to meet federal guidelines. A second

type of objective was the establishment of a planning or review process. An example from the ECS survey: the development by one commission of a master plan for postsecondary education. A third type was the establishment of an agenda for state education policy makers. This was frequently the objective when a commission considered an issue that was very broad, controversial, or not widely understood. One state recently used this type of objective for a study of the complex issues of accountability.

An observation reported by each study commission was that clarity of charge to the commission did not necessarily affect the commission's ability to deal with that charge. If a study commission had enough time to function, it limited the scope of its agenda. For instance, a commission in one state that was asked to explore what education would be like in the year 2000 ultimately produced very specific decisions on school finance formulas, on the election of school boards and on state-mandated courses in elementary and secondary schools.

- Commissioners. When the objective of the commission was to pass legislation, legislators were included as members. Otherwise, few set patterns emerged. Although commissioners were typically citizens from across the state chosen to represent a balance of interests, practices varied with regard to the inclusion of educators. Some commissions included them, but several others deliberately avoided such appointments. In all cases, however, education organizations were allowed to present their viewpoints to the commissions. The time commissioners could give to the study commission proved important. So did the extent and type of commission leadership. In elementary/secondary education commissions, the chairman was not always the sole source of leadership. In postsecondary education commissions, the chairperson of the commission tended to carry the major burden of leadership. Total membership on commissions ranged from about 20 people to about 35.

- The role of the governor. In most cases the governor played a very important role in the creation of the study commission and then a less active, hands-off role during its deliberations. When the legislature established the commission, the involvement of the governor was less strong but still important.

Operations. The commissions studied seemed to follow a five-step process: definition of the task before them;

accumulation of information on the topics they wish to cover; analysis of this information; development of recommendations; and, where possible, implementation of recommendations in the policy process. As commissions carried out those five steps, problems sometimes arose in these areas.

- Staff considerations. Because the commissions came into existence for a limited length of time, staffs were generally small. The work of in-house staff was often supplemented by in-kind contributions of staff time by outside agencies (e.g., the governor's office, the state education agency, or the legislature). Often, too, fairly extensive use was made of outside consultants who could accumulate and analyze information.

- Funding. Study commissions were funded by many different sources: the legislature, the governor's office, foundations, businesses, state education agencies, postsecondary education agencies. The support came in the form of dollars and of in-kind services. An interesting approach used by one commission was to incorporate as a nonprofit organization. It then sought tax-deductible donations from corporations and succeeded in raising $300,000.

- Time frame. One of the commissions surveyed met for only two months, whereas others met for as long as two years. If a problem had already been adequately defined and data had been collected, a commission needed less time than if these steps remained to be taken. The commission that met for two months, for example, was responding to a federal demand for final desegregation plans, a more finite task than that facing the commission charged with generating options for the year 2000.

- Schedule of meetings. The study commissions surveyed generally met every four to six weeks. Sometimes, however, meetings were unevenly spaced because some steps in the study process required more attention from the commissioners than others. Issues that required very frequent meetings were often addressed by subcommittees that reported back to the commission as a whole.

Activities. The commissioners and staff contacted by ECS commented on several aspects of commission activities.

- Planned agendas. Commission meetings generally had planned agendas, often organized around staff presentations by consultants, so that commissioners could discuss substantive aspects of particular policy problems.

- Public participation. Public hearings received mixed reviews as a way for study commissions to obtain citizen input. In one state, a large number of public hearings held early in the study process were deemed valuable in formulating policy. In another state, only a few public hearings were held at the outset, but a final conference of statewide delegates was deemed valuable in implementing the recommendations of the commission. Elsewhere, commissions took testimony from organized groups at hearings and meetings, which allowed interest groups to present their viewpoints without necessarily serving as commission members.

- The media. Media coverage varied greatly from commission to commission, for the most part in direct relationship to the importance of the issue being discussed. Some commissions sought media coverage to help publicize the issues they were considering. Others were covered anyhow. Several commissions decided to include newspaper editors among their members.

Recommendations for setting up a study commission.

- Know your state. State politics, education climate and economic conditions are all important factors to consider when you plan a study commission.

- Know the policy area the commission will address. Also know what other states are doing in that area and what is practical in your state.

- Know the actors. The most important decisions in creating a study commission involve choosing the right people to sit on the commission.

- Decide what outcome is desirable, e.g., legislation, agenda-setting or ongoing planning and oversight. All require different mixes of people and have different applications to policy; each requires different planning.

- Focus on issues. A task force needs, either through a mandate or through early deliberation by commissioners, to narrow its charge to a manageable set of activities.

- Appoint commissioners who are willing to commit enough time to participate actively.

- Appoint some commissioners who are legislators, if the work of a commission will result in new legislation.

- Select staff who are knowledgeable about the issue and who can relate well to the legislature and the governor's office.

- Consider using consultants. They can be very helpful in bringing expertise to the discussion of difficult or controversial issues.

- Consider the possibility of incorporating a commission as a nonprofit organization so that businesses can make tax-deductible contributions to commission funding.

- Make sure that the duration of a commission is realistically related to the complexity of the issues it considers. It is better to allot too much time for a commission to do its work than too little. Time extensions can undermine credibility.

- Set a schedule of commission meetings as early as possible so that commissioners can make firm time commitments.

- Develop a focus for each commission meeting -- a planned agenda of formal presentations, for example -- so that solid progress is possible.

- Establish mechanisms for gathering information from representatives of a variety of major interests. This is often done by appointing representatives of interests to membership in a commission, but the same goal can be reached by (1) setting up subcommittees on which interests can be represented (so that the commission itself remains small enough to make decisions effectively) or (2) calling for testimony from people or groups whose points of view need to be heard.

- Consider how media coverage will affect the work of the commission.

PURCHASE ORDER

Name _____

Address _____

City, State and Zip _____

Price: Single copies of *Issuegrams* are free upon request to the seven ECS Commissioners in each of the 51 member jurisdictions. For others, each *Issuegram* is $2, including postage and mailing. Orders for 10 or more copies are $1.50 per copy. Orders are sent first class mail. Prepayment is requested. Please make checks payable to the Education Commission of the States. Phone orders are accepted at $2.50 per *Issuegram* (to cover invoicing). Call Terry Shinkle: (303) 830-3820.

____ Check here if you are an ECS Commissioner

____ Please bill me

____ Payment enclosed

Issuegram Number	Number of Copies	Price	Total Due

Total Cost For Order $ _____

Mail this order form to: Distribution Center
EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES
1860 Lincoln Street, Suite 300
Denver, CO 80295

ecs issuegrams

A service of THE EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES

ISSUEGRAMS *are summary reports on major education issues written for state leaders. They include background information, analysis of differing views, lists of sources and references – all written for busy readers. Each is updated periodically.*

Issuegrams currently available:

1. Research Findings on Effective Teaching and Schools
2. Achievement Trends in the Arts
3. Collective Bargaining Issues Continue
4. Adult Learning: A Major Trend
5. Low-Cost School Improvement
6. Achievement in Mathematics and Science
7. Testing for Teacher Certification
8. Energy Education: Another Passing Fad?
9. How Well Can Students Read and Write?
10. Special Education and the Law
11. State Programs of School Improvement
12. Compulsory Schooling and Nontraditional Education
13. Education for Economic Growth
14. The Four-Day School Week
15. Setting Up Blue Ribbon Commissions
16. Student Achievement in Public and Private Schools
17. Information Society Challenges Education
18. School Programs To Prevent Drug Abuse
19. Tuition Tax Credits
20. Student Minimum Competency Testing

Issuegrams available March 1, 1983:

21. State Budget Incentives for Quality Improvement (Postsecondary Education)
22. State Licensure/Authorization
23. Recruitment, Selection and Retention of Teachers
24. Teacher Shortages
25. School Finance Equalization
26. School Finance Reform
27. School Finance Litigation
28. Programs for Special Populations
29. State Education Roles and Missions
30. State K-12 Governance Structures
31. The State Legislative Voting Process in Education
32. Block Grant Implementation
33. Prayer in the Schools
34. Curriculum and the First Amendment
35. Sex Equity in Education
36. Legal Issues in Education Testing
37. Student Skills for a Technology Economy
38. State Strategic Planning for Technology
39. Migrant Education
40. Program Review in Postsecondary Education

It is the policy of the Education Commission of the States to take affirmative action to prevent discrimination in its policies, programs and employment practices.

Please turn page for ordering information.